The basic unit of the Chinese language is the zi (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each zi has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string zi together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

This week: Words about autumn

涼
Pronunciation: liang (Putonghua, 2nd tone), leung (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: cool, coolness

涼 (qiú liáng = autumn-cool) = cool autumn weather. 涼風 (liáng fēng = cool-winds/breezes) bring 涼意 (liáng yì = cool-idea/feeling). 乘涼 (chéng liáng = ride-cool = strolling/staying in cool/shady open places), 沖涼 (Cantonese chung leung = Putonghua chong liang = splash-cool = taking shower/bath) make us 涼快 (liáng kuài = cool-pleasant).

涼拌 (liáng bàn = cool-mix-ingredients) are cold dishes. Cantonese 涼茶 (leung cha = Putonghua liang cha = cool-tea) is strong medicinal herbs tea that clears toxic body-heat. Foods of 寒涼 (hán liáng = cold-cool) nature, e.g. crabs, should be eaten sparingly.

Ungrateful/heartless people are 涼薄 (liáng bó = cool-thin/harsh), 涼血 (liáng xué = cool-blooded). Their downfall makes us 心涼 (xīn liáng = heart-cool = feel nice/vindicated).

by Diana Yue